

THE GOOD LIFE

A STUDY OF THE 23RD PSALM

PART 6 – THERE REMAINS A REST

REVIEW

Does the LORD desire for us to live a good life? You bet your bottom dollar He does! Yes, our good, good Father wants His children to have & enjoy life. And it doesn't take a theological degree to know this either! In fact, it takes religion to pervert this truth and make us believe that God doesn't want the best for us in this life, not just in the next.

I say this because if we would just consider how we are towards our children, we can easily realize that He would want His children to live a good life from beginning to end just like any good parent on this planet wants the same for their kids.

How many of you parents out there want your children to struggle and go through hardship for a few of their first few years in the real world? I guarantee you for those of us who love their kids, it was hard watching them struggle to make ends meet. Well, that's because our heart is for them to enjoy blessings and not endure curses all the days of their life and not just when they get older. Likewise, the LORD doesn't want this life in the flesh to be hard, arduous, and difficult for us, His children. He wants us to experience His goodness right now in the land of the living.

Jesus used this exact same rational when He said in His Sermon on the Mount, *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"* (**Matthew 7:11**)

Another verse that paints this picture for us is **Third John 2** which says, *"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers."*

You see, while this was a letter written from the apostle John to a man named Gaius, this is still inspired Scripture, revealing God's will for all of His children. And notice, first of all, that God refers to us as His "Beloved": This means that He is addressing those who (pardon the poor English) "be-loved!" In other words, since this verse is God speaking directly to us, by calling us His "beloved", He is letting us know that we are greatly loved by Him.

You see, this simple truth, if understood correctly, should help us to embrace the truths contained in the rest of this verse that our Heavenly Father wants us to prosper in every area of our lives and live in perfect health. Why? Because again, how many of you parents out there who truly love your children want anything less than the best for them? No, you want them to prosper in every area of their life, and you certainly don't want them sick and suffering! Any parent that wills for their children to be sick and to suffer should be locked up with the key thrown away! Why? Because if any natural parent did the things to their children

that God has been accused of doing to His, that parent would be indicted in just about every country on the earth today.

So how can we believe God is any different – especially when His love for us far outweighs any love that we have for our children? No, you “be-loved” and because God loves you so much, He wants you to succeed and prosper on all levels! Yes, He wants you to be healthy, not sick! That’s right – He wants your soul to prosper and every other area of your life to follow suit. Thank you, Father!

So let’s not get confused on all of this – If the LORD put into our hearts this capacity of love for our children and this inherent desire to see them blessed in every area of their lives, then we must believe that this is His heart for His children too!

So the way we are studying this good life that our Father wants us to live is by looking at the 23rd Psalm – which is a Psalm that perfectly describes the life God wills for us in this world, not in the next. And last week, we started looking at verse 2 where David goes on to say that the Lord my Shepherd, who will not let me lack, will also “make me to lie down in green pastures ...”

We saw that the word “pastures” simply describes the abode or habitation of shepherds. So this describes the type of places that the Lord, our Shepherd, leads us unto. But then David calls these pastures, “*green* pastures.” And we learned that this Hebrew word translated “green” is referring to “grass” itself rather than the color of it. However, this doesn’t describe just any, old grass, but new, fresh, tender grass – the kind of grass that is the most desirable for sheep to both eat and to lie down on. So this specific type of grass that He is said to make us lie down on is the best kind of grass – grass that is new, grass that is fresh, grass that is tender. It’s the best quality!

And we obviously were not just talking about “grass” here. While grass is certainly a very important part of the sheep’s life, the kind of “green” that is important to us as humans is the kind that is goes in your purse or wallet – money! Therefore, the “pastures” that the Lord our Shepherd is going to lead us into are the best places that money can buy. Yes, the best homes, the best workplaces, the best churches – the best, the best, the best – all aspects of the good life.

We also focused on the fact that our Good Shepherd makes us to “lie down” in these green pastures. And we saw how this literally describes “stretching oneself out or to lie stretched out.” Thus, the reason that this word is translated “to couch” in a couple of places. Therefore, we saw that this word describes what we would call, “reclining.” Therefore, we saw that today, we might translate this first half of Psalm 23:2 – “He helps me to take a load off and to rest & relax.” All of this means that this good life that God has prepared for us to walk in isn’t just a life of hard work, labor, and toil. No, it also involves restful & relaxing times too! This is a point we will look deeper into this week ...

HE LEADS ME

So now, let’s move to second half of **Psalm 23:2**: After David says, “He makes me to lie down in green pastures,” he goes on to say, “*He leads me beside the still waters.*”

So again, we made the point from the first half of verse 2 that God doesn’t ever “make” us do anything. Rather, He always gives us a choice. Yes, He is a God who gives us a free-will and will never force His will on any of us. Understanding this is a key part of knowing how to enter into the good life God has for each of us.

But what He says in the second half of the verse is just as important to understand – “He *leads* me!” So yes, just as God has given us the ability to choose these green pastures, He also is said to lead us beside the still waters!

So the LORD “leads” us; He doesn’t drive or drag us. That’s why He is called the “Good Shepherd” and not the “Good Cowboy.” A cowboy has to rope & tie his animals, but a shepherd simply leads them with a still small voice and guides them with His presence.

This reinforces the fact that the LORD is not going to make us do anything, but will gently lead & guide His sheep in the way they should go.

Now we would do good to adopt this same mentality that David had here – the confidence that the LORD does in fact lead me: Notice how in this verse, he boldly and definitively declares, “He leads me ...”, not “I hope He leads me.”

Can sons and daughters of God expect to be led by the Spirit of God like this? Well, based on other Scriptures, we sure can! Let me give you a couple of them ...

First of all, notice how Jesus said in **John 10:4**, “... *and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.*” In fact, this entire chapter makes the point several times that the Lord’s sheep both hear and know their Shepherd’s voice and that they are led in and out by Him. There is no questioning this! It’s a fact! The Lord’s sheep hear His voice and follow Him!

Then in **Romans 8:14**, the apostle Paul said, “*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.*” So in this verse, he is saying the same thing as Jesus – that if we are sons & daughters of God, then we are led by the Spirit of God. You see, some read this to say that if we are a son of God, then we ought to be led by the Spirit, but it’s really saying that God’s children are led. So yes, we can expect to be led by the Spirit of God!

You see, there is no questioning the fact that the LORD our Shepherd will lead us, but the fact is, a lot of Christians are not confident in their ability to hear from God or to be led by His Spirit. Therefore, they talk differently than David did here, saying things like – “I wish I could hear from God” or “I hope I can be better led by the Spirit.” But no, we need to adopt this same mentality that we, as the LORD’s sheep, do in fact hear His voice and we do in fact know His voice just like Jesus said in John chapter 10 – for it is in the confidence of faith that we walk in this truth.

In fact, the word that David used here in Psalm 23:2 for “leads” describes one being “guided.” This reminds me of a verse that describes to us what (or who) God’s children are to be guided by ...

Jesus told us in **John 16:13** that when He, the Spirit of truth, comes He will guide us into all truth. Who is this Spirit of truth? It’s the Holy Spirit, of course. This is why Paul said in Romans 8:14 that the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God.

Well, when it comes to being “guided,” you cannot guide something that is not already moving, can you? Saints, you can sit on a boat and try to turn the rudder to the left and to the right but if the boat is sitting idle, it’s not going to turn. But if you take that same boat and get it moving a bit and then turn that same

rudder ever so slightly, you will begin to turn the boat. But, with this example, all you are essentially doing is guiding the boat.

So, for the Holy Spirit to “guide” you, then the assumption is that you are already moving. Moving where? Moving in the direction that is already laid out to you in God’s Word! Yes, taking the appropriate steps to following the voice of the Good Shepherd. Amen?

Church, one of the most important things you can ever learn in the Christian life is how to be led by the Spirit of God! If we can learn to be led by the Holy Spirit 100% of the time, we will never stumble. Yes, if we were led 100% of the time, we would never get the wrong babysitter, we would never get food poisoning, we would never get weary and exhausted working for the Lord, we would never get ripped off, etc. etc. etc. Learning to let the Holy Spirit guide us is critical to living a victorious & good life – for as **Second Corinthians 2:14** says, *“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ ...”* The Holy Spirit will always lead & guide us in the way of victory!

WHAT NOT TO BE LED BY

Church, while we are supposed to be led by the Spirit in the church today, far too often believers are led by things other than the Holy Spirit. So let me give you a list of things we are not supposed to be led by, but most Christians are. Most of His sheep are ...

- **FEAR-LED** – Many people are led by the fear of what could happen. In other words, they are led by things like panic, anxiety, worry, and fear, when what we are supposed to be led by is peace. Yes, the peace of Christ is what is supposed to be calling the shots in our life, not fear (See Colossians 3:15).
- **MONEY-LED** – A vast majority of people follow the almighty dollar. Yes, they take jobs and move to other cities based solely on a pay-raise. They make investments based solely on greed and covetousness. But money is not our master, amen? Yes, mammon isn’t our God; our Good Shepherd is.
- **EMOTION-LED** – We are not to be led around by our feelings & emotions because they are fickle. It’s easy to get hyped up about something and as soon as the emotions wear off, we seem to just not feel “led” to do it anymore. Just as sure as you got excited about something you can bet the bank that you will not feel that way forever. We need to learn to know if we are being led to do something instead of just making an emotional decision and then if we are convinced that it’s God leading us, we need to stick with it till He tells us to move on and not when our emotions have worn off.
- **HEAD-LED** – A lot of folks are led by their head. Yes, they lean to their own understanding and intellect on every decision they make. They think everything has to make sense, but God will lead us to do many things that make no sense at all. So if we want to be led by the Lord, we can’t overthink things.
- **IDEA-LED** – Some people are led by every little idea that pops in their head. Ideas are not always God ideas. We might have a seemingly great idea pop into our head, but we should still pray about it to see if it’s God or not. And even if it is God, it might not be the right time to act on it.
- **OPPORTUNITY-LED** – Some will go to take jobs and accept invitations based solely on the opportunity to present themselves. But what we need to always remember is the devil can inspire very well-meaning Christians to ask you to do things just so he can cause you to stumble. Never forget – opportunities are not always God.
- **PROPHECY-LED** – In our circles, many make life changing decisions based solely on what someone else tells them. Every prophet, prophetess, or believer is capable of missing it when they prophecy because God is flowing through imperfect vessels. That is why we must have that inner witness confirming what they say. If we don’t have a peace about it or an inner excitement from the Spirit of God going off inside

of us, we shouldn't act on it. Someone might say, "So and so gave me some word and I did it and it ruined my life!" Well, it's their own cotton-pickin' fault! We all have the Holy Spirit inside of us to bear witness with our spirit and to lead us. Every "word" is to be confirmed by the "witness."

HOW DOES HE LEAD US?

So if these are things we are *not* to be led by, how does He lead us? Well, the first and foremost way that our Shepherd leads His children is through His WORD! Yes, just like a Shepherd predominantly leads His sheep through his words, this is how our Good Shepherd leads us. This is the foundational aspect of being led by the Holy Spirit because He will never ever lead you to do anything that is contrary to the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word agree!

Yes, even if you hear the so-called audible voice of God; even if you see a so-called angel; or even if you have a so-called vision of God Himself – if it does not line up with the Word of God it is to be thrown out. God has given us the written Word of God so that we will know what His will is. We must seek to know first what God's general will is, then we can seek to know God's specific will. God once said, "Find out what I've already said to you and if I want to say anything else to you, I will!" The written Word of God is the surest way to be led by the Spirit of God!

Once we hide God's Word in our hearts, then we give the Holy Spirit something to work with because then He can, at the appropriate times, bring those verses to our remembrance. The Holy Spirit will sometimes lead us just by simply speaking a Scripture to us.

But again, the Spirit and the Word agree! While the general way that the Spirit leads us is through His WORD, the primary way that He'll lead us in our everyday life is through the INWARD WITNESS. Yes, the predominant way New Testament believers will be directed by God is through the inward witness. You won't get a prophecy for every big decision you make, much less the smaller decisions. God's not gonna give you a vision of every person He wants you to minister to. Every time you need to make a decision you can't go and take a nap to get a dream from God. No, God's gonna lead you through a less spectacular means called the inward witness most of the time.

Where is this concept of the inner witness found in the Scriptures, you ask? It's found in **Romans 8:16** which says, *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."*

Notice how the Holy Spirit within us – the One we are being led & guided by – is said to "bear(s) witness with our spirit." The phrase "bear witness with" literally means to "co-witness" in the original Greek language. So who is the Holy Spirit a co-witness with? This verse goes on to tell us that it's "our spirit." Now our spirit is the real us within these bodies. So the Holy Spirit doesn't bear witness with our head (our soul) or with our feelings (our flesh). He bears witness with our spirit that has been recreated in Christ Jesus. Our spirit, which has a witness in itself, will line up with the things of God and when it and the Holy Spirit start "testifying" what they know to do, we will have the co-witness going off on the inside of us.

So when we are looking for direction from the Lord we are to look inside because He bears witness with our spirit, not our intellect, mind, or feelings. We are to be led internally, not externally! However, it is sometimes hard to discern between our spirit and our soul, our heart and our head.

One of the ways that you can tell when He is bearing witness with your spirit is found in the last part of this verse. It says, "...bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." How do you know that you are a child of God? Someone would say, "I don't know how I know. I just know!" Well, that's a Scriptural response because the witness of the Spirit is simply a "knowing." If the Holy Spirit can bear witness with your spirit that you're God's child, then don't you think He could bear witness with your spirit to let you know what job to take or who you are to marry? Of course, He can and He will if we will just learn to yield to Him.

I like to call this inner witness our "knower." **First John 2:20** says, "*But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.*" The anointing, the Holy Spirit, knows all things and communicates those things to our spirits. When direction comes – you'll know it! If you are like, "Ehhh, I don't know about that" or "Ehhh, I'm not sure why, but there is something not right about that." Those "Ehhh's", however, can just be your head trying to talk you out of what your heart is telling you to do. That is why we must practice being led through trial and error on the small things like asking for direction on what route to take home from work or asking Him to help you find something that you misplaced. You ask the Holy Spirit things such as this and then wait till He bears witness with your spirit. Then when something just pops into your heart and you just "know" something, act on it! Sometimes you'll miss it and sometimes you'll hit it right on the head. Just learn from your mistakes and from your success – even journal it – and you'll grow in your ability to be led by your "knower."

You see, we don't have to know everything; We just need to know the One Who does know everything! And when we learn to detect the "knower" we will know everything we need to know. Amen.

MY RESTING PLACE

So, yes, the LORD our Shepherd leads us. There is no question about the fact that He guides us! It's just a matter of discerning how He does this through the Holy Spirit and then learning to follow His guidance.

But I want you to notice specifically what David went on to say that our Good Shepherd leads & guides us to in Psalm 23:2. He said, "He leads me beside the still waters."

The phrase "beside the still" come from the Hebrew word *menuwachah* and describes a "rest or resting place." It describes a comfortable, still and quiet place or thing (and in this case, that *thing* is "water"). So, these "still waters" could literally be described as "waters of rest" and for us to be led beside these still waters would describe us being led and guided alongside places of rest – places that are quiet, still and comfortable. Amen.

I have found that being by still waters is one of the most peaceful experiences one can have. So as we learn to be led by the Holy Spirit, the place He will lead us into is peace. Therefore, this means that if we aren't in peace, then we ain't being led by the Holy Spirit.

There are a lot of people who think they're being led by the LORD to do things, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Being led by God will always take us to these still waters. It doesn't mean it will always be easy or that there won't be challenges to overcome, but it does mean that we will have peace no matter what we are walking through.

But this Hebrew word that means "rest" is actually the word that was used to describe the Rest of God referred to in **Psalms 95:11** - the same Rest that the writer(s) of Hebrews describe in Hebrews chapter 4. Now this "Rest" was an obvious reference to Canaan – the Promised Land – and was described as a rest in contrast to their 40-year journey in the wilderness – which was a feeling of never belonging, always moving and striving, never experiencing the fullness of the blessing.

And sadly, that is where many Christians live – in the wilderness, living from miracle to miracle (which means they are also living in crisis to crisis) and experiencing this striving, working, and arduous lifestyle. There is a better life, saints! Yes, I said there is a better life! And that is – living in the blessing of Canaan where we enter into His Rest, having taken His yoke upon us! (Perhaps Jesus healed so often on the sabbath because it was easier for God to work when His people were resting. Selah.)

But the Scriptures teach us that there remains therefore a rest for the people of God – where we can cease from our works, our striving and busyness. This is the Sabbath that we are called to observe – where we learn to rest in the work of another – namely, the Lord Jesus Christ's work on the Cross. Its ultimate fulfillment will be when we leave these tents and live in the eternal rest in the Kingdom of God, but there is also a rest to be experienced now.

JESUS, OUR SABBATH

Now this leads us into an important biblical principle that was first referred to in the beginning during creation, then was instituted under the Law, and finally was fulfilled in Christ – the Sabbath.

The Sabbath, of course, came about because of how God rested on the seventh day from His work of creation. But it is important to understand that God did not "rest" in the sense that we think of resting. When we think of resting, we think of recuperating because we are fatigued, but this is not what is implied here. God rested on the seventh day, not because He was tired and exhausted. He rested because the work was finished and complete. There was nothing left to do.

This word "rest" described more of a cessation of activity, the ending of effort. A good example of what transpired here is an artist who was working to paint a beautiful masterpiece and then when his or her picture was completed, they lean back in their chair observing their completed masterpiece maybe with their brush in their mouth. This image in no way describes an artist laying down his brush because it got too heavy. No, he rested from his work because his work was finished and complete.

God had created the heavens and earth and all that is within them and saw that it was all "very good" (1:31). It was finished! His work was complete! So, He was attempting to get His people to see that the work of creation had been completed. Therefore, He gave them the Sabbath to illustrate to them that they are to rest in God's finished work of creation and redemption.

We see this in **Deuteronomy 5:15** when we are told – *"And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."*

Notice the word "therefore" in this verse: Being redeemed from Egypt is a type of our salvation, so this is why He commanded them to keep the Sabbath. He did it with His mighty hand and outstretched arm. Therefore, Jesus brought us out of the kingdom of darkness, and we should rest in His finished work.

Practically speaking, God gave them one day a week not to work to illustrate to them that they are not their own source. In other words, the Sabbath had an element of trust to it. You had to trust the Lord that He could do more by His mighty hand and outstretched arm in 6 days than you could do by your arm and hand in 7 days. It was to illustrate to them that they are not their own Savior and Provider – God is.

So, this is what we need to understand about the seventh day – that when we were made a new creation in Christ that His work in us is complete. Therefore, we are not a work in progress. His work of grace in our spirit is finished! And it was not by our own hands that we are saved – Jesus did the work Himself.

This is why Jesus said on the Cross just before He gave up His spirit that “It is finished!” He was saying that the price that needed to be paid for our salvation was complete. He was saying that what He hung on that Cross to accomplish was sufficient. Nothing else needed to be done! The price needed for our redemption has been fully satisfied and we are complete!

You see, the word “sabbath” obviously means “rest.” In fact, the words “seven, sabbath, & rest” all come from the same basic word in the Hebrew *Shabbat*. And we know the number seven in biblical numerology describes “completion.” Therefore, we see the meaning of the Sabbath... It is that God indeed rested on the seventh day because His work of creation was completed. Amen.

So, we being children of God who have been made new creations in Christ Jesus ought to also follow our Heavenly Father’s pattern – know that the work of the new creation (i.e. salvation) has been completed within us and now we are to rest from our works of the flesh that seek to accomplish what has already been accomplished in us through Christ Jesus. Amen. We are complete in Him. The work of salvation has already been accomplished within us, so now we can cease from our works (i.e. works that seek to justify and obtain what can only be received by faith in His grace) as God ceased from His works. We must cease our WORKS for righteousness (which are not good enough) and REST in the work that Christ did to atone for our sins.

Therefore, we can rest in all the works that Christ has done for us! He has paid the price and done everything that needs to be done in regard to our salvation! And this is why Jesus is called the Sabbath – because His finished work on the Cross has paved the way for us to rest from our labors and enjoy “still waters.” This is the rest that remains.

THERE REMAINS A REST

Now the physical fulfillment of the Sabbath will be when we enter in the rest of heaven, but the spiritual fulfillment is the rest we have entered in positionally in Christ. Yes, just as God gave Israel the 7th year Sabbath (which they never observed, mind you), and also the 7th day Sabbath, God has given us two fulfillments of this type and shadow.

But there are three phases to our salvation, right? One being when our spirit was born again and where old things passed away and all things became new positionally. Another being when Christ returns, and we receive our glorified body. But there is a third kind of salvation, and that is us learning to live every day in the promises of God and walking out our salvation in this life.

Therefore, we have a third rest that remains – the promise of practically entering His rest everyday as we cease from our own works and self-effort and trust in the work of another.

I believe Jesus described this other rest when He said in **Matthew 11:28-30**, *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Notice that twice in this passage Jesus makes reference to "rest." We must understand that one rest is given, the other is found. One is experienced when we come to Christ upon making Him our personal Lord and Savior. This is the positional rest we have entered in to. But there remains a rest that we can partake of experientially – and that is when we exchange our weakness for His strength, when we learn to wait on the Lord and draw near to Him in fellowship. This is when we will run and not grow weary, when we will walk and not faint. Amen. (See Isaiah 40:31)

Learning to taste and see that the Lord is good and that He is our strength when we are weak is such a vital truth to experience. Oftentimes, we gravitate towards doing things in our own strength and we begin to pull a "Martha" – being troubled with much serving. This is when we must become more like Mary who learned when to sit at the Master's feet and draw her strength from Him. Strength for service comes from fellowship. This is when we yoke ourselves up together with Him and He does the majority of the pulling. "Burnout" comes as we do all the pulling ourselves. This is not what the Lord intended. The Master said, "Take MY yoke upon you (i.e. get yoked up together with Me) and I will give you rest.

Friends, the Christian life is meant to be light and easy, not heavy and hard. And the moment we begin to feel like our burden is heavy and hard is the moment we have simply realized that we are taking our own yoke and are not benefiting from Him pulling the weight for us.

RECLINE & REST

In fact, all of Psalm 23:2 teaches us this one principle:

For example, let me remind you of what David said in this verse: The entire phrase at the beginning of this verse, "He makes me to lie down" – comes from one Hebrew word – the word *rabats*. Again, this word literally means "to stretch oneself out or lie stretched out, or to recline."

Saints, it is not the Lord's will that any part of our Christian walk feels like "work." Sure, it is not always pleasant putting the flesh under, and sure, it is not always easy to go through the various trials we fall into. But if everything always seems arduous and an uphill battle, then we are likely missing it in some way.

You see, the reason working for the Lord is light and easy is because we are yoked up together with Him. In those days, oxen were yoked up together in order to share the load they were carrying. So, if we have been yoked up together with Christ, then we can be certain that He will bear the entire burden! This will result in our walk being light and easy, as opposed to heavy and difficult. The only time that it becomes laborious is when we, of our own accord, unyoke ourselves from Him and try to carry the weights of this life ourselves. This is when the Christian life becomes burdensome and overbearing and we, as a result, lose our joy.

But, no, Christianity is not intended to be burdensome. Again, there is certainly discipline over the flesh and the resistance of temptation involved in the life of a Christian, but in regard to our growth and increase in every area of our walk, it is God Who carries that entire burden. Praise the Lord!

Therefore, to lie down in green pastures describes our Good Shepherd leading us, His sheep, to places of comfort, rest and relaxation – like a spiritual couch or recliner. Amen! And as we have seen, the leading us beside still waters teaches us the same – that there remains a rest for the people of God - a stream that makes glad the city of our God. It is beside these still waters that we find rest for our souls.

May you find rest for your souls today and experience the Promised Land of Rest – a quality of this good life – that is found only in Christ. Amen.